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Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-10 LAB-04
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, TH
SUBJECT: LABOR DEVELOPMENTS

1. ON FEBRUARY 17, 1978, RTG DEPARTMENT OF LABOR (DOL) OFFICIALLY REGISTERED LABOR CONGRESS OF THAILAND (LCT) AS "EMPLOYEE COUNCIL" ESTABLISHED IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 120 OF THE LABOR RELATIONS ACT OF 1975 AS AMENDED. LCT LEADER PHAISAN THAWATCHAINAN SAID IN PRESS INTERVIEW THAT DOL AGREED TO REGISTER LCT AFTER LCT MODIFIED TWO PROVISIONS OF ITS CONSTITUTION WHICH DOL INTERPRETED AS ENCOURAGING POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT DEEMED ILLEGAL UNDER LABOR RELATIONS ACT AND MARTIAL LAW PROVISIONS. IN CONVERSATION WITH EMBASSY LABOR OFFICER, LCT PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER SUNTHON KAEONET SAID LCT WILL NOW CONCENTRATE EFFORTS ON FORMING SECRETARIAT AND ORGANIZING UNORGANIZED WORKERS. IN THIS REGARD ASIAN AMERICAN FREE LABOR INSTITUTE (AAFLI) HAS PROMISED BOTH TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT DURING LCT'S START UP PERIOD. IN INTERNATIONAL SPHERE, SUNTHON SAID LCT PLANS TO SEEK AFFILIATION WITH INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS (ICFTU). ON PERSONAL LEVEL SUNTHON INDICATED HE IS CONSIDERING LEAVING THE EXPRESS TRANSPORT ORGANIZATION TO DEVOTE FULL TIME TO LCT ACTIVITIES.

2. COMMENT: REGISTRATION OF LCT, WHICH COMES AFTER FIVE MONTHS DELAY AND MUCH ACRIMONIOUS DISCUSSION, ELIMINATES
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YET ANOTHER SOURCE OF FRICTION BETWEEN THAI LABOR LEADERS AND RTG. PHAISAN, SUNTHON AND OTHER LCT LEADERS NOW FACE LONG TERM TASKS OF DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE LCT ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND OVERCOMING CHALLENGES OF RIVAL GROUPS SEEKING LEADERSHIP OF THAI LABOR MOVEMENT.

3. A BITTER DISPUTE HAS BROKEN OUT AMONG THREE RIVAL UNIONS

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IN THE MASS TRANSPORT ORGANIZATION, THE STATE ENTERPRISE WHICH RUNS BANGKOK'S BUS SYSTEM. ALTHOUGH MERITS OF THE ISSUES HAVE BEEN LOST IN HEAT OF DISCUSSION, DISPUTE DEVELOPED AFTER REPORTS CIRCULATED AMONG LCT LEADERS THAT FORMER OWNERS OF PRIVATE BUS COMPANIES (NATIONALIZED IN OCTOBER 1976) HAD ORGANIZED CAMPAIGN, WITH SUPPORT OF SOME MTO UNION LEADERS, TO PERSUADE CURRENT RTG TO RETURN BUS COMPANIES TO PRIVATE OWNERSHIP. DRAWING ON THESE REPORTS MTO WORKERS UNION PRESIDENT WICHIAN KANDEE, WHO HEADS LARGEST OF MTO UNIONS AND FAVORS KEEPING BUS SYSTEM A STATE ENTERPRISE, ACCUSED LEADERS IN RIVAL MTO UNIONS BUNSOM RATANAKAMPHON AND PREECHA KAORUNGRUANG OF RECEIVING FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM FORMER OWNERS TO DISCREDIT PUBLIC OWNERSHIP OF BUS SYSTEM BY ACCUSING MTO MANAGEMENT OF CORRUPTION AND BY FOMENTING LABOR STRIFE. WICHIAN WAS SUPPORTED IN HIS ACCUSATIONS BY LCT LEADER PHAISAN THAWATCHAINAN, WHOSE POWER BASE LIES PRIMARILY IN LARGE STATE ENTERPRISE UNIONS. IN RESPONSE, BUNSOM AND PREECHA DENIED THE ACCUSATIONS, BROUGHT SLANDER CHARGE AGAINST WICHIAN AND ACCUSED PHAISAN OF COVERING UP MTO CORRUPTION. IN ADDITION THEIR SUPPORTERS LAID BLACK WREATH IN FRONT OF PHAISAN'S OFFICE, BURNED EFFIGY OF PHAISAN AND DEMANDED PHAISAN'S RECALL AS HEAD OF LCT. AS FURTHER COMPLICATING FACTOR LCT LEADERS MAINTAIN THAT BUNSOM, PREECHA AND COLLEAGUES ARE RECEIVING ENCOURAGEMENT AND SUPPORT FROM SANAN WONGSUTHI, THE THAI REPRESENTATIVE OF THE BROTHERHOOD OF ASIAN TRADE UNIONISTS WHO IS SEEKING TO DIS-CREDIT LCT AND PROMOTE A RIVAL LABOR COUNCIL WITH POWER BASE
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IN PRIVATE SECTOR UNIONS.

4. IN EFFORT TO MAKE RTG DEPARTMENT OF LABOR MORE RESPONSIVE TO HIS LEADERSHIP, DIRECTOR GENERAL WICHIT SAENGTHONG HAS SHUFFLED FIVE OF NINE DOL DIVISION CHIEFS. AMPHON JUNNANOND HAS MOVED FROM EPLOYEE RELATIONS DIVISION TO WORKMEN'S COMPENSATION FUND DIVISION; PRACHIT PRADAPSOOK FROM WORKMEN'S COMPENSATION FUND DIVISION TO SECRETARY OF DOL; CHALIN AMONTHAM FROM LABOR STUDIES AND PLANNING DIVISION TO LABOR RELATIONS DIVISION; PRASONG RANANUND FROM SECRETARY OF DOL TO ALIEN OCCUPATION DIVISION AND AKAPON WANAPUTI FROM ALIEN OCCUPATION DIVISION TO DOL INSPECTOR. VICHITRA PROMPUNTHUM HAS BEEN PROMOTED FROM CHIEF, LABOR RESEARCH BRANCH, TO CHIEF, LABOR STUDIES AND PLANNING DIVISION. WICHIT HAS ALSO ANNOUNCED THAT DOL WILL REQUEST FY 79 BUDGET OF 162 MILLION BAHT ($8.1 MILLION), A SIZABLE INCREASE OVER FY 78 BUDGET OF 93 MILLION BAHT ($4.65 MILLION). WICHIT HOPES TO EXPAND DOL STAFF FROM 700 TO 1200 EMPLOYEES.

5. AAFLI COUNTRY PROGRAM DIRECTOR FOR THAILAND VALENTIN B. SUAZO, JR., HAS INFORMED EMBASSY HE WILL EXCHANGE JOBS THIS SUMMER WITH HIS AAFLI COUNTERPART IN THE PHILIPPINES KEN

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HUTCHINSON. ON FEBRUARY 27, 1978, HUTCHINSON, WHO IS
CURRENTLY IN BANGKOK ON ORIENTATION TRIP, PAID COURTESY CALL
ON AMBASSADOR WHITEHOUSE.
WHITEHOUSE

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Secure: OPEN
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TAGS: ELAB, TH
To: STATE
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